Lafayette Historical Society NEWS
Enlightening Our Community

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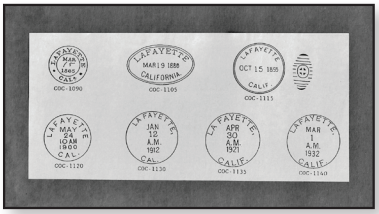
The Lafayette Post Office Celebrates 155 Years!

There are many institutions, places, and people that make a town feel like a real town, but none has cache like the post office. Every American city likes to have one: a place to connect with the rest of the world and maybe get the town gossip. This year, Lafayette's very own post office celebrates ***155 years*** in the business of knitting the community together.



Historic Postmarks from the Lafayette Post Office

The first post office opened in **1857** as part of the **Old Pioneer** grocery store at *3535 Plaza Way*. Mail was supervised by the first Postmaster **Benjamin Shreve**, who served for 30 years and was succeeded by his son **Milton**. This location is best known as the site that served as a **Pony Express** stop from **1860-1861**, but after just 20 runs the historic service was shut down.

Carrie Van Meter in front of Post Office in early 1900's

In **1904** the post office relocated to a small "hole in the wall" building at the corner of *Tunnel Road (now Mt. Diablo Boulevard)* and *Moraga Road*. **Carrie Van Meter** served as ***Postmaster*** there until **1927**, when the office relocated again. The tiny set-up served just 11 families who lived in the area.

As the city expanded and changed it's name from ***La Fayette*** to **Lafayette**, town services consolidated in the relocated *#2 Grammar School* house at *3535 Mt. Diablo Blvd*. That building contained the phone company, library and post office, with **Emelia Schutt** as *Postmaster* until **1952**. At this point in its history, rural carriers still brought mail to distant houses and ranches and even occasionally delivered live animals like chicks, bee hives and chameleons.

With post-war growth came an ever bigger post office. The fourth office was located at *3561 and 3563 Mt. Diablo Blvd.,* and this iteration was where Lafayette's office attained First Class status on **July 1, 1949**. Just ten years later, the office would relocate again, to the first building in ***La Fiesta Square***, *973 Moraga Road*. This fifth post office is best known as the *"wild wild west" location*, because three loaded long- barrel Smith and Wesson revolvers were installed at the finance windows. The guns didn't last long and neither did the location, with another move and post office #6 opening in **1958** at *3498 Mt. Diablo Blvd*.

On **July 1, 1971**, the *"Post Office Department"* became the semi-private **United States Postal Service**. Then on **June 5, 1976** *Lafayette* lost its distribution clerks and all of its carriers to *Walnut Creek*. This was a hugely unpopular move, with many local post office workers having to relocate their jobs to *Walnut Creek*. The post office proper was moved to two portable trailers at *3641 Mt. Diablo Blvd*. The permanent building was completed in **1979**.

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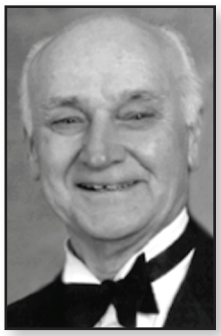
President's Message

A visit to the ***Lafayette Library*** to check out or return books could provide an opportunity for you to increase your knowledge of *Lafayette* history. **Laura Torkelson** and **John Stevens** have put together the first of four informative displays on the neighborhoods of *Lafayette* to better chronicle the development of our town. The first installment is on display and covers the downtown section of town where the initial settlement began in **1848**. See what the downtown businesses looked like over ***160*** years ago….many of the original buildings are still in existence but may have a different use or look than in pioneer times. This display will be followed in the next year or so with displays and information on our other "hoods": *Springhill, Happy Valley and Burton Valley.* If you have memorabilia *(or memories!)* from the old neighborhoods, come into the **History Room** on any ***Saturday afternoon between 12:00 and 2:00 p.m***. **Laura** and **John would be interested in talking to you!**

After you park your car in the Library garage, you might take a moment and view ***Old Betsy's*** *(the fire engine)* cage….we have several historical signs that have been hung there. The signs are too large to have in our **history room** but are of some historical importance so it was decided to hang them in the cage. Currently on display is a sign from the law office of **Harold Mutnick** *(local attorney, whose wife Dorothy wrote the definitive history of the area:* ***Some California Poppies & Even a Few Mommies - A History of Upper California during the First Hundred Years****)* and a sign from the *Lafayette* office of former *Lafayette City Council* member and *Mayor, and member of the Board of Supervisors* **Gayle Uilkema.** Stop by and check out the signs.



Tom Titmus

There are now copies of ***Voices of Lafayette*** available for purchase (**$20**) at the **History Room**. A huge thank you to **Bill Eames** who gave permission for **LHS** to reprint this book the writing of which he sponsored and to **Julie Sullivan** so wonderfully put it together. The profits from the sale of the book will benefit the ***Historical Society***.

It is with sadness that I report the death of **Tom Titmus** in August. Tom was a member of the **LHS Board of Directors** from **1996-2012** and ***President of the Society*** from **1999-2005**. His wife **Janice** also served on the **LHS Board**. Tom was an active part of the *Lafayette* Community and practiced law here for many years. His quiet leadership and service to the ***Historical Society*** will be missed.

We are working on a program for December on **Pearl Harbor in December of 1941** so stay tuned for further details.

—Mary McCosker

The Lafayette Post Office Celebrates 155 Years! — *Continued from Page 1*

Happily by the year 2000, *Lafayette* got its mail carriers back. They were and are still housed in a *"carrier annex"* at *3426 Mt. Diablo Blvd.* behind **Bo's Barbeque**.

It's interesting to note that *Lafayette* has the ***3rd oldest post office*** *in Contra Costa County*, after *Martinez and Alamo*, and still remains as evidence of *Lafayette's* pioneer heritage.

Special thanks to **Dave Obera,** who served the Post Office from **1946-1979** and prepared a very helpful history of the *Lafayette Post Office*.

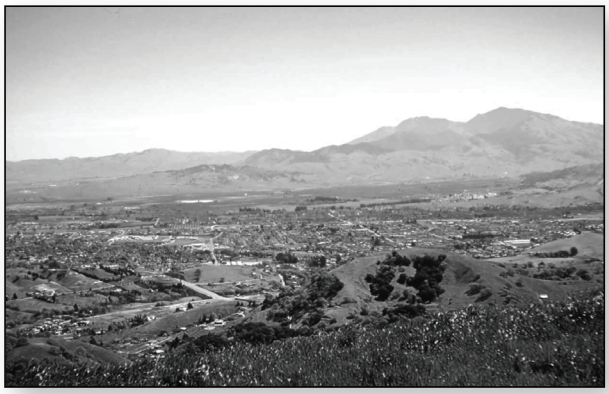
For more information and photos of the *Post Office,* visit the **History Room** in the ***Library and Learning Center*** – enter on *Golden Gate Way.*

—Amanda Berkson-Brand

Temporary Post Office Trailers

Pleasant Hill Annexed to Lafayette!

Part II



This is Pleasant Hill – Guillermo's viewpoint, 1832. (Pleasant Hill is in the foreground, the intersection of Withers and Taylor is beyond at left.) Photo March 1961 courtesy of Kirk Patterson

When we left **Guillermo** in July he was married to **Maria Antonia Galinda** and had a growing family in *San Jose.* He also had a growing herd of cattle in *Pinole* and was "commuting" between the two. He needed to solve this dilemma, by getting his own rancho!

He submitted a petition to ***Governor Figueroa*** on **June 2, 1835** for *Rancho las Juntas*, built a corral there, and started an adobe house. Since the **Welch** family still lived in *San José,* he hired a *majordomo* to look after the cattle when he was away. One night the Indians burned the house, stole the horses and scattered the cattle. The *majordomo* fled. **Guillermo** abandoned his petition.

He petitioned again in **1844**. This time, in a surprising burst of speed, the new ***Governor Micheltorena*** formally made the grant for three leagues on **February 21**. **Guillermo** finally moved onto his very own *Rancho* in **1845**, but sadly he died in **1846**.

A lawsuit filed in Federal Court by **Guillermo's** son-in-law, the administrator of his estate, ***(United States v Swanson, et al)*** caused the western boundary of *Rancho las Juntas* to be shifted easterly sufficiently far to exclude the hill on which **Guillermo** had stood to draw his petition map. *(The trial began S**eptember 12, 1854** and raged until **September 15, 1864**, when **Judge Ogden Hoffman** finally gaveled the case to a close.)*

At the trial, ***Alcalde* José Ygnacio Sibrian y Pacheco** testified: "…the lagoons are on top of a hill from which the waters run on either side of the hill. Welch claimed from the top of that hill on the eastern side thereof looking toward *Monte Diablo*. That high hill is called "*Reliz*"…" (It becomes significant that ***Señor* Pacheco** testified in **1860**.)

In other testimony, **G.F. Allardt**, surveyor for **R.C. Matthewson**, ***deputy United States Surveyor***, stated: "… this ridge of the highest land for several miles around…the summit of hills arising to the westward from *Murderous (sic) Creek*…"

Part of the result of the litigation was the official *"Plat of the Rancho las Juntas as finally confirmed to the **Administrator of the Estate of Wm Welch**,"* on which were plotted the three forks of *Murderer's creek* and ***McClellan's House.*** (Near the present *Tiegland Road*, located at the foot of the "high hill" described by *Señor **Pacheco***.) A schoolhouse, the area's first, was built on ***McClellan's*** property in **1860**.

That "high hill," tall as the Eiffel Tower, shadowed the schoolhouse. And it would have been in the little one-room structure that the founders of the proposed school district would have met in **1860** to choose the most appropriate name to describe their new District. And what other name would they logically have chosen than that of the most defining object in their corner of the world?

And so the *Pleasant Hill School District* would have been born, officially transcribing the name for the record the very first time. Later, the near-by road was so labeled, then the entire area, and, ultimately, the City.

A hundred years later, the *Local Agency Formation Commission*, in its infinite wisdom, proclaimed the hill that bore **Guillermo Welch's** boot prints on its summit to be within the *Sphere of Influence of the City of Lafayette!*

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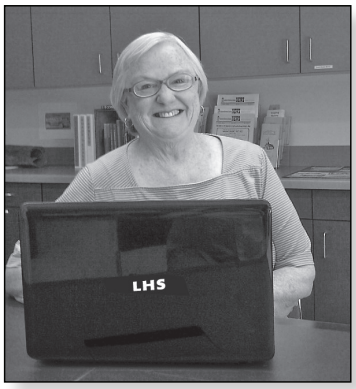
Meet Our Board and Volunteers

Laura Torkelson

Laura grew up in the Navy, which is to say on both coasts of the *U.S.* as well as *Istanbul and Japan*. Her father's last duty station was *Treasure Island* at which time her parents bought a house in Lafayette. She came to *Stanley* in 8th grade from *Yokosuka, Japan*. After graduating from ***Acalanes High School***, she went off to Cal. She then moved to Seattle where she met her husband and had a son. Her parents still lived in Lafayette, and when visiting, her husband (born and raised on the coast of *Washington where 80 inches of rain a year was the norm)* would say, "Why do we live in the rainy northwest when we could live here?" They finally made it happen and moved to *Lafayette* in 1984.



Laura Torkelson

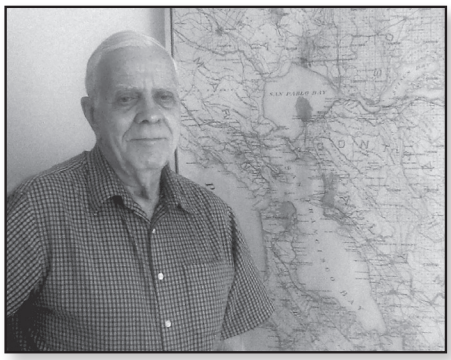
She taught school for **30** years - the last **22** at ***Orinda Intermediate Schoo***l in Special Education. She worked with kids who were in regular classes but who needed some support and remediation. When she retired three years ago, she thought about exploring the concepts of roots and community. Neither had ever developed in this Navy kid. One of the things she knows about herself is that she is mostly interested in people - hence her career - and history is all about people: why they came, what they did, how they impacted the future - are all fascinating questions. Learning about *Lafayette*, and making it her home in a deeper sense, was an opportunity offered by the ***Lafayette Historical Society.***

Laura has been working on the displays in the *Lafayette Library* as a way of communicating some of our history to the children and adults who use the library. She's also had input into tours/trips for the community that **LHS** provides. She volunteers two hours a week on Saturday and has enjoyed the people who are there with her and the visitors who come in. She loves looking at the old pictures, reading old newspapers and letters, and imagining the lives of the people who were here before she was. Preserving and passing on our history is fun and interesting. And, learning about what works and what doesn't can inform and influence our 21st century decisions. *She's glad the Lafayette community has supported the* ***Historical Society*** *and knows* ***LHS*** *is looking at a bright future!*

Ray Peters

Ray Peters (*aka* ***Elam Brown***) has been a longtime **LHS** volunteer and *Board member*.

Ray was born in *Missouri* where he received his early education. After college he joined the ***Corps of Engineers***, working in "jungle places and iceberg places", and then ultimately the *Presidio* in *San Francisco* where he discovered he liked *California* better than *Missouri.* He worked on the construction of the *Richmond-San Rafael Bridge* and met and married the love of his life, **Barbara**. He taught surveying at UC Berkeley for eight years and then started an engineering-surveying business in *Lafayette*. He assisted in the construction of the *Lafayette Gazebo* in commemoration of the bicentennial of the US Constitution.


Ray Peters

Ray has served as *President of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce* and of the ***Lafayette Historical Society from 1983-1985.*** He served on the *Board of* **LHS** from **1983-1998**.

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Pleasant Hill Annexed to Lafayette!

Continued from Page 4

And so, except for an eastern portion still under the jurisdiction of Contra Costa County, *Pleasant Hill's* namesake was officially annexed into the *City of Lafayette*.

A subdivision later constructed on that eastern portion of *Pleasant Hill* remaining in Contra Costa County was then inappropriately named *"Lafayette Hills."*

Where's Judge Hoffman when we need him?

—Ray Peters

Meet Our Board and Directors

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Ray was once slated to give a talk to LHS about some dull and long-forgotten subject but instead rented a Victorian coat and top hat from the *Thrift Shop,* hobbled with a cane into the meeting room, and portrayed **Elam Brown**. He has also appeared as his alter ego for third grade students of Lafayette history.

Ray's writing career includes an historical novel ***(The Lafitte Case)*** and a surveying section for the *McGraw Hill Real Estate Handbook*, discovering in the process that writing non-fiction is easier than fiction but not as much fun. He is presently researching and writing ***Thirty Cents an Acre***, the story of **Elam Brown's** Lafayette, vetted by noted genealogist and descendant of **Elam Brown**, **Brent Rutherford**.

—Mary McCosker

2012-2013 Board of Directors

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Contact Us: ..... History Room – 283-1848
– *or* – lafayette.history@comcast.net

"We Thought You'd be Interested"

On *Saturday*, **October 13th**, the *Martinez Historical Society* is hosting a tour of eight (8) private homes representing the architecture of the *late 19th and early 20th centuries* in historical *Martinez*.

The tour begins at the **Shell Club House** with its intact *Arts & Craft* interior and the adjacent **Shell Oil Museum** – both located at 1635 Pacheco Drive. The tour includes the ***1890 Borland House*** *(home of the* ***Martinez Museum****)*, **John Muir's 1882 Italianate Victorian Home** and the **1849 Martinez Adobe**.

This year's tour includes an exhibit of historical photographs and vintage camera equipment, live musicians at several locations, craft demonstrations, displays of art, and refreshments. Also included is a side tour of the *Nature's Way Doll Centre* with its collection of historical dolls.

Tickets are **$25** and can be purchased in *Martinez* from ***Char's Flowers*** *(516 Main Street)*, ***Rumain's Jewelry*** (510 Center Avenue), ***Bagel Street Café*** *(580 Center Avenue)*, ***The UPS Store*** (*the Lucky Shopping Center)* and ***I've Been Framed*** *(411 Ferry Street)*. For online purchase of tickets using a credit card, please go to the **Tour website**: www.MartinezHomeTour and click on ***"Buy Tickets"***.

Proceeds from the **Tour** will benefit the *Historical Society's* effort to restore and reopen the **Old Train Depot** in downtown *Martinez* portions of which date back to **1877**.

More information is available on the website www.MartinezHomeTour or by calling **(925) 864-8457**.

Lafayette Historical Society
POST OFFICE BOX 133, LAFAYETTE, CA 94549
www.LafayetteHistory.org

Return Service Requested

Lafayette Historical Society Membership Application

(Please photocopy form for additional names)

Name: _____

Spouse: _____

Address: _____

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Membership Categories and Annual Dues

(Please check one)

- ❑ Student Membership $10.00
- ❑ Individual Membership $25.00
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- ❑ Sponsor Membership $500.00

Please indicate areas of special interest

- ❑ Publicity
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- ❑ Telephoning
- ❑ Displays
- ❑ Oral Histories
- ❑ History Room
- ❑ Data Base Entry of Photos
- ❑ Photo Collection
- ❑ News Clippings
- ❑ Fire Engine
- ❑ Walking Tours-Outreach
- ❑ Other_____

Please mail this application to:

Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette, CA 94549